

THE NEW YORK TIMES
16 March 1976

Secrets, Anyone?

By Russell Baker

State Department fellow calls up. He's got some classified documents he wants to leak. Says America ought to know about this. It's red hot stuff. Will I meet him, take the documents, splash them in the papers?

"You think I got a sponge in my head?" I hang up sweating. Suppose the phone is tapped? It rings again. I tear it out of the wall and put it in the trash.

Little while later, a knock at the door. Who could it be? The F.B.I.? Bozo the Congress on one of its \$350,000 stamp-out-these-unpatriotic leaks investigations?

"Who's there?"

"A State Department fellow. Open up and get your red-hot leaked classified documents."

I put the chain on the door, then nail up a two-by-four to brace it against bodily assault, go back into the living room. He's standing there smiling. "Came in the back window while my stooge faked you out at the door," he says.

I ask does he want to ruin me in the news game. Doesn't he know I can be wiped out if I start reporting things the Government doesn't want people to know? I am scared. Scared of being investigated by Bozo the Congress. Scared the President will sic the F.B.I. onto my bank accounts and love life. Scared Henry Kissinger will tell the world I'm the mug who is destroying America's standing in the world. Scared that the CBS affiliates will phone my boss and ask him to fire me.

"What kind of news hawk are you?" he demands.

"A chicken news hawk," I tell him.

He lays a paper on me. "A subpoena?" I ask. "Read it," he says. I read it. It says Henry Kissinger is strongly in favor of the American home.

He hands me another. It says Henry Kissinger has taken the position that the American mother is the greatest mother on earth.

Another. It says Henry Kissinger loves the American flag.

"If you have any journalistic courage, you will expose Kissinger's secret views for what they are," he says, "and let the chips fall where they may."

It is breathtaking. I am almost tempted. "You're giving me—me, a small-bore print writer—the chance to reveal that Henry Kissinger is in favor of home, flag and mother?"

"Do you have the courage to do it?"

Yes, I am almost tempted. But I remember the fate of Daniel Schorr, who revealed that what the papers said Bozo the Congress had found out about the C.I.A. was actually what Bozo the Congress had found out about the C.I.A. I don't want to be put out of work like Schorr. I don't want to be investigated for revealing to the public what the public already knows.

And I think of this brave State Department fellow, who is willing to risk his career so America can know what kind of man Henry Kissinger really is. Do I have the right to help him destroy himself?

I stall. "Do you have any other red-hot documents?" He draws the blinds. Perspiring heavily, he produces a sheaf of papers. Classified records of Kissinger's diplomatic conversations with foreign statesmen! I recoil.

"But—but—" I can't even speak.

"I know what you're going to say," he murmurs. "These papers reveal that Henry Kissinger is absolutely brilliant."

"Dynamite!" I gasp. "Kissinger will be furious."

"He will be thunderstruck," says the State Department fellow.

I agree to sleep on the proposition. "But what about you?" I ask as he leaves. "You know, of course, that Bozo the Congress will ferret you out as the leaker."

He smiles the smile of a man who knows a thing or two.

"I don't think we will have much trouble out of old Bozo with this sort of thing," says he.

"You mean it's too hot for them to touch?"

"Let us just say that Bozo the Congress isn't going to risk having the President take away its clown suit," he says.

I am really moved by this guy's courage. I tell him I know it will be very bad for him when Kissinger finally tracks him down as the leaker who exposed Kissinger's brilliance and love of home, flag and mother.

"Yes, terrible," says the State Department fellow. He shudders.

"What will Kissinger do?"

"He will call me into his office and threaten that if I ever do it again he will send a note home to my mother."

I am unable to subject the poor devil to this kind of treatment. After he is gone, I put the secret papers in the fire.

A week passes and he phones in a rage. "Are you ever going to print those secret documents," he demands, "or are you trying to get me fired?"